

Open in app ↗

New: Navigate Medium from the top of the page, and focus more on reading as you scroll.

Okay, got it



Lyam Thomas Christopher

Follow

Oct 29, 2017 · 19 min read · ✨ ·  Listen



 Save     

# The Philosophers' Stone

## The Forbidden Myth That Restores Sanity



**A**re you possessed by an evil spirit? When you look at the world, does some mysterious force compel you to see it as purposeless, meaningless, and random?

Modernity's grand plan for you as a proud citizen of a technological utopia — as a trouble-free intellectual luxury in a sed, push-button paradise of plastic and chrome — is ultimately a plan that cuts you off from nature, sees the

human body as a mere machine, and denies the existence of the soul of the world, of the very life force that fuels its own outlook. How much of a hold over you does this spirit of modernity possess?

Today's teachers, scientists, and leaders will not say it, of course, but their actions reveal that they are possessed by a limiting worldview, a belief system that compels them to see the universe as empty and mostly dead. As the "external world." A strange place of otherness where the stars are cold and unfeeling and nature is devoid of any animating intelligence. Only humans possess the intelligence, right? And the forests, oceans, and sky are harsh, indifferent "physical" places filled with brutal laws that will destroy us if we don't get them under control. Mother Nature does not bother to speak to us because, well, she isn't real, right? Just a poetic notion. A personification we came up with to comfort ourselves. Likewise, gods and spirits aren't real either. There is no such thing as destiny. The universe is sucked dry of meaning, emptied of fantasy. And fantasy gets dismissed as "just a dream" at best, or a hallucination at worst. We have learned to stifle the mystery of a falling star by turning it into a meaningless chunk of space debris.

This spirit of modernity takes us over and makes us ill, producing a variety of symptoms: depression, loneliness, anxiety, greed, and a hostile attitude toward the universe in general. And these symptoms snowball into self-destructive behaviors such as poor diet, drug and sugar addiction, and the poisoning of our own habitat. Toxic behavior, toxic environments, toxic food. All this further exacerbates the problems of modernity by damaging the human brain and nervous system — such that we no longer have the ability to see depth, meaning, and beauty. Not even when we try.

Our ancient ancestors weren't so different from us. They were also possessed by spirits. Like us, they were compelled to interpret natural events in terms of the preoccupations, desires, and fears of their times. But they weren't brain-damaged. Instead of seeing the universe as soulless, they were adept at allowing deeper levels of the mind to come out and take over. To come out and express more profound meaning. For them, the forests, oceans, and sky were very much alive, speaking to them through signs and portents. There was much more going on in the night sky than mere space debris. This deeper kind of awareness is still possible for modern people like you and

me, though we usually have to practice healing disciplines (such as fasting, ritual, meditation, and exposure to the elements) in order to restore it.

### **The Stone that Fell from the Sky**

Astrology is yet another of the mystical disciplines that helps humans restore their ability to see depth and meaning. The most common belief the ancients had was that each star was a god, or a mighty spirit looming over the Earth, influencing events that happen below. When a “star” fell, it was not meaningless. It was tragic. It echoed deeply in the human psyche, as though each of us has a primordial memory of what it’s like to fall from a great height.

Is that what happened to you? Did you “fall” from some vast, heavenly realm and end up in a body? Wrapped up in a clever nervous system that tricks you into believing that you and the stars have become separated? Or worse yet, have you ended up here, wounded from your fall? Floundering? Stranded in a damaged nervous system that struggles to see depth and beauty?

In such a way, Lucifer fell to Earth. As the myth goes, he was a great angel of light. Not only *an* angel of light but *the* angel. Lucifer literally means “light bringer.” When the one God of the Abrahamic religions commanded all of his angels to bow down to Adam, Lucifer refused to do so. He loved the pure light of God above all else, and he couldn’t bring himself to adore this dimwitted creature molded out of the dust of the Earth. And so he was cast out for his disobedience.

Some legends say that he didn’t go down without a fight. The Grail legend says that one third of Heaven’s angels rallied under him. That is, one third of the angels rallied under Lucifer, one third rallied under God, and one third remained neutral. And so, Lucifer and his entire retinue fell. It must have been quite a meteor shower that could conjure up a battle story like that — so deeply impactful to the human psyche that we remember the myth of fallen angels to this day.

Before that terrible fall, Lucifer had been a glorious creature. He had strolled through the starlit Garden of Eden, decked out in his regalia of celestial light. And there was one very special light of his, reflected in his crown — for in his crown there gleamed a rather large emerald. As the legend goes, this magnificent green jewel got dislodged

during the battle in Heaven, and as it fell, the neutral angels caught it and hid it away somewhere in our Earthly realm.

This emerald has passed into legend as the *grail*, or Holy Grail. The Grail is not just a product of Christian myth. It is much older than that. It has pagan, shamanistic roots, and it has taken numerous forms in countless other stories. Its appearance as the Christian cup of blood comes to us relatively late, from Cistercian monks in the 13th century.

Alchemists acknowledge all of the different manifestations of the Grail, but most notably, they seek to obtain it as the “Philosophers’ Stone.” For them, the substance of Lucifer’s fallen stone provides a way back up into Heaven. Or better yet, this “Stone of the Wise” represents a way of bringing Heaven back down to Earth.

When humankind fell out of Paradise, what is it that we lost? A stone? Is there something magical hidden away somewhere in the substance of this world? A cure for our damaged nervous system? Or does this mythical object represent something else? Such as a nervous system that has already been cured so that meaning and beauty are once again second nature to it?

---

*“On my death bed, I will pray to the gods and the angels  
Like a pagan, to anyone who will take me to heaven  
To a place I recall — I was there so long ago  
The sky was bruised, the wine was bled, and there you led me on...”*

— from “Like a Stone” by Audioslave

---

In the last article, I revealed the secret of the Grail. A secret that is supposedly so difficult to grasp that Zen monks sit for hours at a time staring at a blank wall in an attempt to realize it. Similarly, contemplative Christians stare at sacred objects, Tantric Buddhists concentrate on mandalas, and occultists gaze into crystal balls. It makes little difference where you look. The elusive, secret substance of the Grail is everywhere.

## Meditation

Is meditation really necessary? Or are we just brain damaged? Wounded from our fall into an unnatural lifestyle? Wounded and afraid of seeing the world as it actually is?

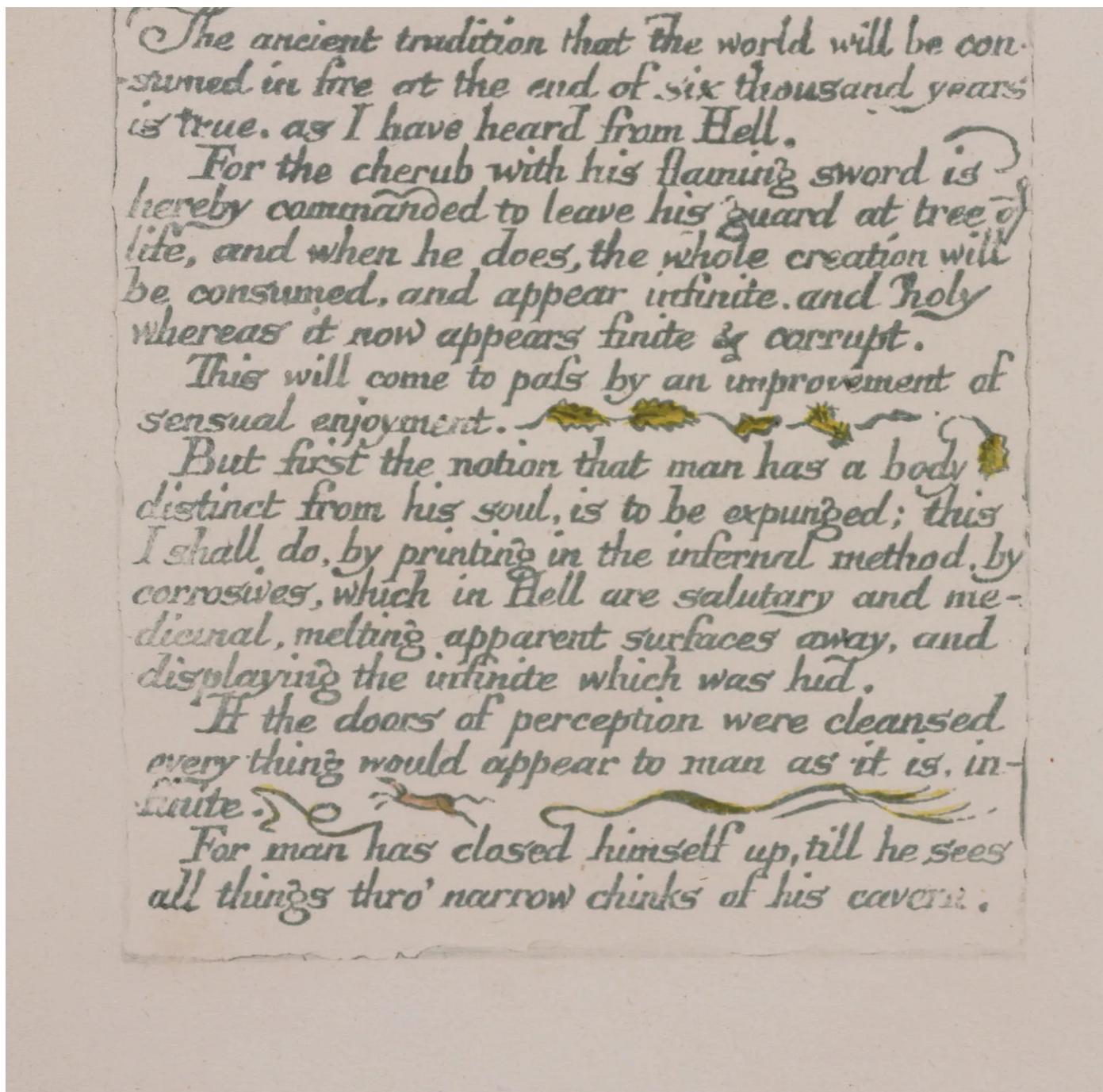
The human mind has developed the relentless ability to create a gap between itself and the universe — and of course, we are afraid of removing that gap, for when we do, we essentially bring about a near-death experience. Stare into a crystal ball long enough and the very substance of it, the substance of the world itself, will burst forth and overwhelm you. The gap between you and the universe dissolves. The magic substance of the Grail spills out. The world is no longer “over there,” and you are no longer regarding it safely from “over here.” It’s all right here, right now, and all of your dreams, fears, and strivings are instantly wiped out by the mysterious substance that gushes forth from the heart of creation. You are utterly consumed by bliss. Destroyed.

*“From Me did the All come forth, and  
unto Me did the All extend. Split a piece of wood, and I am  
there. Lift up the stone, and you will find Me there.”*

*— from the forbidden Gospel of Thomas*

When you meditate, what is this mysterious substance that threatens to spill out and destroy you? When the Grail takes the form of a stone, there isn’t really any liquid to spill, is there? What’s really inside? What does the “stone” metaphor actually mean?





From \*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell\* by William Blake

## Prima Materia

It should be obvious, of course, that Lucifer's lost stone is not really a meteorite. Nor is it some kind of magical pill that pops out of a test tube after the right ingredients have been combined. The stone is actually a metaphor for the enlightenment experience. When we obtain the Philosophers' Stone, we achieve what the Buddha achieved. We find what was lost when we fell. We recover who and what we truly are. Sometimes this state is symbolized by stone, or crystal, sometimes it is characterized by water, or blood, and sometimes it comes in the form of fire or light. All of these experiences are

authentic. But I'm afraid they are ultimately confounding to us unless we know what the Grail is actually made of.

When alchemists begin looking for the Stone of the Wise, their first task is to identify the *prima materia*. The next task, then, is the Great Work itself. The *magnum opus*. To refine the *prima materia* and transform it into the *lapis philosophorum*. Obscure Latin words make the alchemist's craft sound mysterious and fancy, yet the term *prima materia* does not really have a fancy meaning. It simply means "prime material." In other words, the *prima materia* is the basic substance of reality. When alchemists begin looking for the Philosopher's Stone, they start by trying to find the single root substance from which the entire universe is made. So it's simple, really. The *prima materia* is what you see when you look at the world.

Sounds easy enough, right? But of course, there's a trick to it. There's always a trick, isn't there? A booby trap for the unwary? This prime substance is not what ordinary folk like you and me are tempted to believe it is. It is not what ordinary scientists think it is either. To understand the deeper, occult science of alchemy, you must acquaint yourself with the ultimate secret of the universe. The primordial mystery of creation. This secret is the ultimate heresy, and people have gone mad over it or been burned at the stake for teaching it. Behold the most dangerous idea in existence:

The *prima materia* is not matter. It is imagination. The world is not made of material stuff. It is made of dream stuff.

Are you impressed yet? Well, it may sound silly to our jaded modern ears, but is such an absurd idea really so hard to believe? Where did Lucifer wear that emerald again? It was on his crown. In other words, on his forehead. For Tantric mystics who work with the *chakras*, the space between the eyebrows represents the *ajna* chakra. The third eye. The psychic center of vision. This is the center not only of physical sight but also of inner vision, or the ability to dream and to see with the mind's eye. In the original Yogic traditions before the 20th century, the color of this "third eye" chakra was usually green. And even in today's New Age circles, emeralds have retained the magical reputation of restoring damaged vision. Restore the emerald to its crown and you restore humankind's ability to see depth, meaning, and beauty.

This might mean, of course, that our fall from Paradise has something to do with the loss of imagination. In other words, something in the history of our species has damaged our ability to see with the mind's eye.

---

*"We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep..."*

— Shakespeare

---



Courtesy of the Artist Cameron Gray ([parablevisions.com](http://parablevisions.com))

### The Ultimate Forbidden Realm: Imagination

Let's get intense and go completely off the deep end for a minute. What I am about to say is not necessarily true. Please set aside empirical reasoning. That's not the only mode of thought that is available to us. What I will say cannot be proven anyway, so

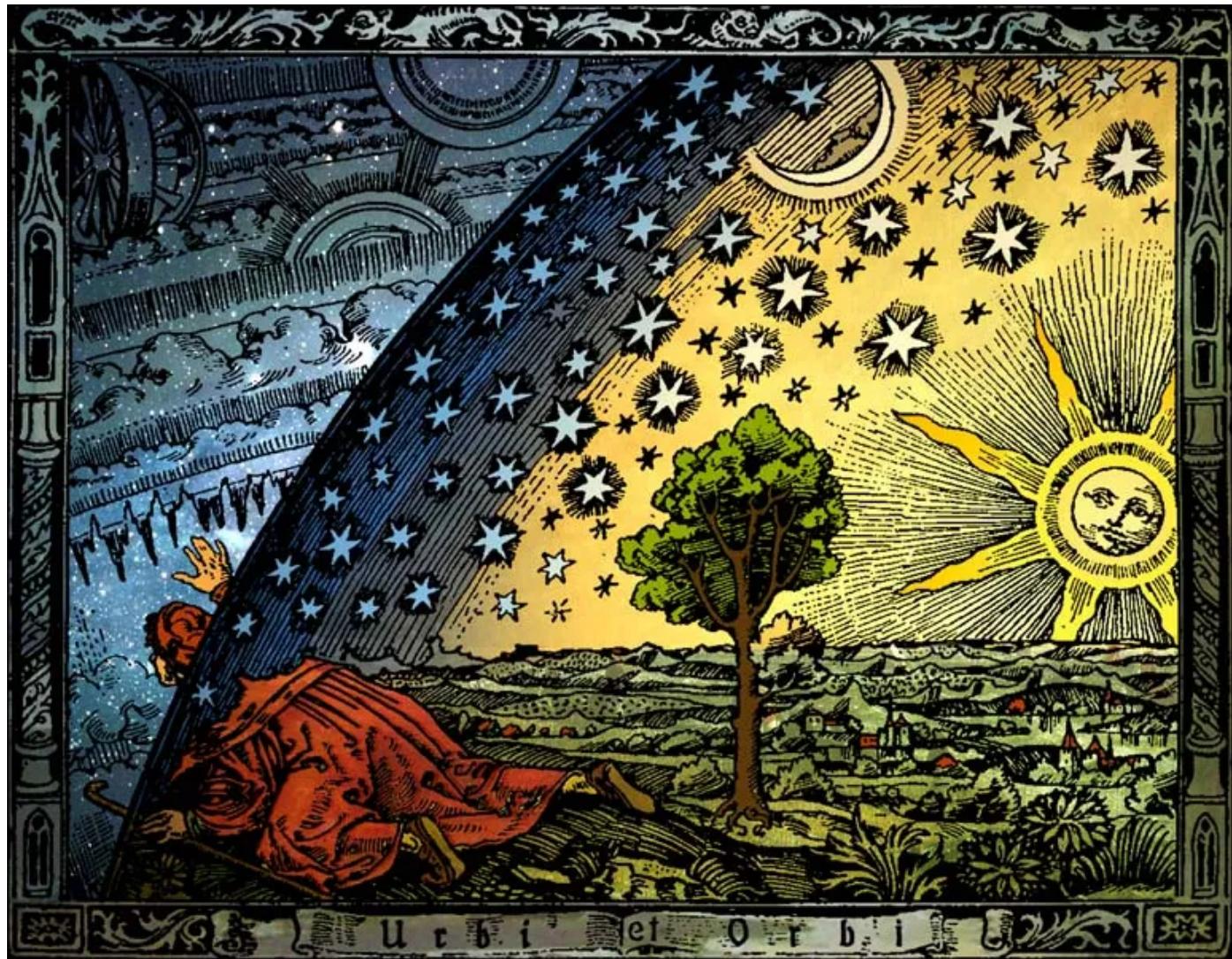
don't bother. Rather, the idea I'm about to share is an ancient way of looking at the world, and when it is adopted, astonishing life changes can result. Some would call it magic...

Imagination is not what we have been taught. It is not just a human faculty "inside" the mind that we reach for when we're planning our wardrobes or remodeling our homes. Imagination is everywhere. It is omnipresent. It is what you see and experience all the time. In truth, we do not perceive the actual "material" world around us. Not directly, anyway. We see formulated images of it as they arise in imagination. What the supposed material world is "out there" none can really say. When it comes to perception, the very concepts of "out there" and "in here" are themselves imaginary. And therefore, we live and move primarily in an absolutely upfront, immediate, and imagistic realm.

Perhaps you are sitting in the park, reading this article on an e-reader. The letters on the flatscreen appear before your eyes like objects that I, the writer, have left there for you to pick up and assemble into meaning. But, of course, this is not entirely true. The letters are not really coming from me, are they? There is a much more immediate reality to consider. The letters are being generated right now in front of you, continuously, from behind the screen, and they will vanish in an instant when the electrical current in your e-reader is shut off. They depend for their existence not solely on the fact that someone has typed them in the past. They depend much more upon immediate, invisible presences, hidden circuitry and a mysterious energy we call electricity.

But who needs an e-reader? It is also possible to sit in the park and read about the secrets of the universe in a book, in the traditional paper-and-ink format. The same principle applies. The ink and the fibers of the page also arise not solely from a printing press in the past. They arise right now beneath your fingertips, from powers that loom behind our supposed physical world. From within the present moment. Look around. The trees and wind, the park bench and the discarded soda can are being generated, right now, from behind the scenes. The ancient Kabbalists were fond of saying that if God so willed it, he could withdraw the stream of power that is generating these things, and they would all vanish in an instant. The universe would cease to exist as though it has an off switch.

This more immediate kind of experience, which sees beyond the standard narrative of cause and effect, is sometimes referred to as the “acausal universe” — that is, the true nature of the universe existing “without cause.” It was not created in the past. It simply *is*. It arises now. The standard law of cause and effect that explains how that soda can ended up on the grass in front of you — that’s a convenient fiction. It explains the universe in one way that is not entirely true. There is another way of seeing it that offers a deeper glimpse of reality. As an acausal reality that is infinitely more potent than the standard history lesson of cause and effect that modernity assumes to be the foundation of our experience.



This metaphor that describes the world as a computer-like, flat-screen projection — very much like the movie *The Matrix* — applies not only to the outer world but also to your imagined inner world. Close your eyes and engage your inner view screen. Continue to visualize the landscape around you as though you can see right through

your eyelids. The longer you do this, the greater the likelihood that some image will arise in your landscape that you did not intend. Modern people are not particularly good at doing this, nor are they good at trusting the imagination to show them things that they have no control over, but with practice they can develop the ability to engage more fruitfully with imagination. Perhaps a deceased loved one suddenly appears in your imagined landscape. Or perhaps a crack opens up and you find yourself on a playground from your childhood. Or a forgotten trauma comes back to you. As you experience the daydreams and spontaneous images that arise in the mind, not to mention the powerful impulses to action that sometimes come with them, it becomes increasingly evident that these phenomena do not owe their existence solely to "you." They appear to have a life of their own as they arise from time to time, as though they are beings from another world paying you a visit.

Where do these dream images come from? From the past? From your personal memory? Not necessarily. They present themselves also as the products of forces that exist deep inside the here and now. They may wear the facades of your dead relatives or appear in the guise of that childhood playground, but the images in your imagination also arise from realms other than your personal mind, or from your past or future. They arise from timeless realms. Your biographical storyline, your vision of a linear life — confined to modernity's fatalistic drama of birth, school, work, retirement, and death — does not really exist. At least not all by itself. There are other vectors of existence. Other cross-sections of reality. Alternative ways of seeing and being. And these, too, are open to you. Imagination is bigger than time.

This "view screen of the mind" way of looking at the world — is it just a form of mental masturbation? Just a *Twilight Zone* fantasy that sci-fi fans and PC gamers entertain each other with? Well, yes and no.

Seeing the imagination as an electrical view screen of the mind is not the end all and be all of spiritual metaphors. However, it can help us open the mind and appreciate the possibility of a universe that is acausal in nature. It shows us that there might be more going on than our little birth-to-death storyline. Can we verify that this bigger, more intense version of reality is real? How do I make the transition from a sci fi vision of the universe to that vision as reality? How can I crystalize a philosopher's dream into the Philosophers' Stone?

For one thing, this is not just a theory. It is the way our mind tends to see the universe when it operates in its default mode, before it has become jaded by modernity. You don't have to believe what you have been taught by the parents, teachers, and leaders of consensus reality. They have almost all allowed themselves to be deceived anyway. Unlike them, you don't need to dismiss imagination as "merely imaginary." Or as merely a brain process. You can let imagination out of its cage. Let it be what it is, and it will spring forth from the make-believe prison house of your skull and become the world again. It will leap forth from the two dimensions of your inner view screen to engulf all conceivable things everywhere.

*“...the imagination is itself the world of light. The world is made by it, and yet the world cannot understand it. That is because the imagination is a manifestation of love, and it is love and the capacity for it that distinguishes one human being from another.”*

— Oscar Wilde

Shamans, magicians, and Romantics tend to view the imagination as an all-encompassing magical field, as a receptive pool of energy into which the five senses feed. Occultists refer to it as the astral light. This energy field responds effortlessly, "bodying forth" images, encapsulating sensory events into your experiences. And these images — as experiences — arise, change, and dissolve according to changes in your senses — as well as from changes in the soul of the world around you. Like your computer monitor, this "imaginal field" is an interface between you, the observer, and that supposed "outer" world.

What about you? Are you imaginary too? No, not imaginary but *imaginal*. Not only does each tree standing before you rise up in your imagination with powerful immediacy, but you "yourself," sitting there looking at a tree, arise just the same. You too are encompassed and given form by the *imaginal* field. You arise right now, together with the tree. Your "body," your "brain," and your "personality" are *imaginal* phenomena in an *imaginal* landscape of other *imaginal* bodies. Even the blue majesty of the overarching sky gets packaged and thrust forth into your immediate experience by this vast image-producing force. We are immersed in a mythical, living energy field, which displays itself as a drama, complete with overarching themes, personifications, foreshadowing, and walking displays of depth, endlessly bodying forth experience to us in the theater of the imagination. We are immersed not in matter, but in metaphor.

This is not just a Western Romantic view of things. It is an experience confirmed by many people of many cultures the world over. Not just shamans, Eastern mystics, occultists, and crazy artists but also Christian monks and nuns. In the Catholic Church, this way of seeing is called sacramental vision.

*“Where are you going? You are not going anywhere. The Self does not move, but the world moves in the self.”*

— Ramana Maharshi

Once again, this is not a vision of the world that I present to you as factually “true.” It is a *way of seeing* that allows you to consider a level of causality that exists outside of time and space, outside of your “flat screen” apprehension of the world. But more importantly, it gets you, hopefully, to stop belittling imagination like all of the responsible adults around you are doing.

Seeing the world this way, if you are able, has devastating implications. The jaded, fatalistic narrative of mankind and his drama, his struggle against the universe, drops away. We no longer need to define ourselves as a character on the timeline of mortality. Or as mere subjects “in here” who perceive objects “out there.” That relationship is imaginary. The world begins to glow with startling immediacy. Something shines from “beneath” each rock in the landscape, from “within” each tree, and from “beyond” each breath of wind, rescuing it and every blade of grass and every abandoned soda can from the bleak drama of our make-believe cause-and-effect existence. We are rescued by an inner presence. By who we truly are right now. The scientist’s dead, objectified universe ceases to be. Our planet is no longer a mere hunk of space debris, aimlessly adrift in the soulless vacuum of space. The universe need not be imagined as a vast, empty “out there,” stretched thin among the stars. Nor do we need to see ourselves as insignificant in the face of it all. That scenario is also imaginary. The two all-powerful gods of modernity, randomness and meaninglessness, lose their sting. Other narratives become possible.

Of course, the imagination described somewhat fantastically here could also be described in a more condescending way. It could be banished into the world of the arts and dismissed as a mere curiosity. Modernity often does this. Will you? Or worse yet, will you see imagination as a simple brain function, a coping mechanism that helps

you, as a biological machine, navigate and find food, shelter, and sex in a hostile “material” world “out there.” Psychologists today are gaining an understanding that such a limited view of human nature, as presented by modernity and industrialization, appears to cause many of our modern psychological pathologies. That is, many of the supposed “disorders” that plague the modern psyche are actually healthy, robust responses from an oppressed imagination. An imagination that is growing tired of being told that it isn’t real.

### **Okay. So now what?**

We have identified the *prima materia*. The next step is to refine it into the Philosophers’ Stone, right? But how do we do that?

The Hermetic alchemists seek out the stone in its “undefiled” state, but what they find is something else entirely. They find the *prima materia* in its corrupted state. Other words for it appear in alchemy as well: *quinta essentia*, *Anima Mundi*, *unus mundus*, quintessence. According to the alchemists, when this substance is ill — as in, when it is crammed into a limited and exploited human condition — it has another fancy Latin name: *massa confusa*. Once again, not really so fancy. It literally means “mass of confusion.”

Somehow in our experience of the world, the imagination has been conditioned. It has been distorted and confused with survival-obsessed dramas and limiting storylines. To such a degree that we become lost in a terrifying “funhouse” of distorted images. To uncover the *prima materia* as it truly is, we must work with it. Polish it. Iron it out. We fix the internal mirror so that it stops distorting the face of the world.

Yes, the *prima materia* is the same thing as the Philosophers’ Stone, but somehow we have lost the ability to see the innate substance of that “stone.” Polish the stone and restore it to its original, pristine condition and suddenly you can see the crystalline substance behind the mirror itself. The Matrix, as it were.

So why do some refer to it as stone? Before we get caught up in our abstract thoughts about the world, arguing about them, before we scrunch imagination into such a narrow sensory band of experience, imagination presents to us a much larger immediacy — a forceful, indestructible potency of “nowness” that precedes our thoughts about the world. The force of this reality is irresistible. It hits you like a brick.

Like a stone. This is the “diamond thunderbolt” of enlightenment known to Tibetan Tantrics. And the imagistic forms that arise within this indestructible substance — forms which shape our habitual, ritualized, daily behavior — are embodiments of that true foundation of reality. They move, yet the stone does not move. We take our thoughts about the world so seriously, don’t we? And yet our thoughts are secondary to it. It is not our facts or opinions that constitute reality, but the pure imagistic potentiality of Now. Our foundation is not in “matter” but in the deep, vast, and endlessly mysterious image-producing potency of the universal mind (for what is matter but a fictional experience that we have literalized).

The philosophers’ stone, therefore, is not something little that we find inside a test tube or dig up out of the Earth. Nor is it a gland deep inside the brain. It is everything. The ultimate ground of being. We call it stone — or even diamond — because it is absolutely foundational and indestructible. Not only the diamond thunderbolt of Tantric mystics but also the adamant of the Greeks and the Luciferian stone of medieval Grail romances. In the Judeo-Christian Bible, it is the fabled “stone the builders rejected.”

*Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the scriptures: ‘The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is from the Lord, and it is marvelous in our eyes’ ”?*

There are numerous procedures for refining the *massa confusa* of imagination into the crystalline perfection of the Philosopher’s Stone. In other words, there are simple techniques for working with the imagination to achieve enlightenment. I will disclose a couple of them in the next Forbidden Realms article. For our more scientific readers, I know this has been an intensely mythical and magical article. In the next piece, I promise to get down to earth with some neuroscience.

Stay tuned!



Merlin's crystal cave



Magick

Alchemy

Meditation

Enlightenment

Life